

Research project raises questions about future of local fisheries

By Susanne Wagner

CANSO - The results of a research study released last week by the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association suggests that the sustainable future of the area's lobster fishery could be in question.

The study doesn't cite decreased landings as the root of the problem, although landings have been steadily declining, but rather an aging fleet of vessels, fishermen approaching retirement and no new fishermen taking over the load.

The study was prepared by Social Research for Sustainable Fisheries (SRSF) St. Francis Xavier University, which is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through its Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) program, in collaboration with the Guysborough County Inshore Fishermen's Association (GCIFA) and its partners Richmond County Inshore Fishermen's Association (RCIFA) and the Eastern Shore Fisheries Protection Association (ESFPA).

Community research coordinator Ginny Boudreau says the research project included telephone interviews with the 210 lobster licence holders in Richmond and Guysborough counties as a means to get a

better picture of what's taking place.

"The focus wasn't just on the lobster but the fishery in eastern mainland Nova Scotia," says Boudreau. "We looked at historical trends, the size and age of boats in the fleet, the age of fishermen and family continuing the lifestyle."

The study found that on average today's fishermen are in their late 40s or early 50s and have fished for more than a quarter century. Many of them have boats between 12 and 14 years old. The research also showed that most of the fishermen fish between 17 and 22 weeks per year.

"The age of the fleet was a little surprising," says Boudreau. "But you have to look at the fact the most of the boats have fibreglass hulls."

One of the major concerns which was raised during the study was recruitment of new fishermen.

"The age of the average fisherman is approximately 51. In five years our association will lose 17 members to retirement and we only have five new members to replace them. It's worse in Richmond," she says. "Who's going to replace the fleet and the economic contribution it makes to the county?"

Boudreau says fathers are not encouraging their children to follow their footsteps in the fishery. The study shows that more than 70 per cent said they would probably not or

definitely not advise their children to enter the fishery, if they had to start from scratch.

"The cost of the boat debt and fishing licences is too high. Everything is inflated with the government's buy-back program."

The final result, according to Boudreau, is it's just too hard for young people to get into the fishery. She adds a fisherman often isn't in the position to give his son or daughter his own gear or he's giving away his retirement income.

"It's a difficult situation and it gets worse every year with more restrictions and costs which the fishermen have to pay."

In addition to licence fees, fishermen also pay membership dues, science fees, the cost of courses and new "required" equipment. On top of all that many are paying higher wharf fees as the government downloads wharf facilities onto communities.

"The trend has moved from family fishing to fishing as a business," says Boudreau. "It's no longer a father/son/wife deal. Fishing has been the economic backbone for many communities for a long time."

Part two of the research will involve face-to-face interviews with fishermen who were identified by their peers as being the most knowledgeable in the industry. Boudreau says she hopes these interviews will start this fall.

Rock

By Stacy I

ANTIGONISH members of the Antigonish-Guysborough Liberal Association met at Silver Glen Antigonish for a general meeting from the guest of Canada's minister Allan Rock.

In his speech, he acknowledged the candidate in the election for the area of Mason.

"In just three days of campaigning, he has done a job," said Rock.

After the meeting, he said he enjoys reporting and speaking to the members of the party.

He spent the day talking to people concerned with transfers in Nova Scotia. He noted that the federal government has pledged in medical equipment Nova Scotia.

"It's important to hear from me a government of people involved," said Rock reporting to them their perspectives.

He said he is pleased regarding the reform efforts related matters a health care program Antigonish to get people involved on the ground.

Rock said recent difficulties in the care sector there a federal government assist the province care providers.

"One thing that is important is the minister and the mi

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World Wide Web. A new VolNet computer was recently installed in Sherbrooke so volunteers can access the Internet or build a presence for their group.